

**Minister Harinder Takhar  
Minister of Transportation**

**at**

**Transportation Summit 2003  
Michigan Partnerships**

**December 3, 2003  
Lansing Center, Michigan**

Thank you, Gloria Jeff, for that kind introduction.

I'm honoured to be here to represent the Ontario government.

I applaud the Michigan Department of Transportation for taking the initiative to organize this important event.

My message to you today is that Ontario understands we need to work together.

We are eager to work with you on issues like border management, because we appreciate how important this is to our people and to our economies.

This event is a valuable opportunity for business leaders, transportation experts, and government representatives from both sides of the border to come together to build a stronger, more efficient transportation system for Michigan.

And because our economies are so closely tied together, it is important that Ontario participates with Michigan in this effort.

The State of Michigan is not just a close neighbour, it is one of our largest trading partners.

More than half of all cross-border traffic between Canada and the U.S. takes place at Ontario-Michigan crossings.

That represents 146 billion U.S. dollars of trade each year.

In fact, the Ambassador Bridge, which connects us, is the busiest crossing in North America, handling 10,000 trucks a day.

Our economies, particularly between southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan, are closely linked.

I am anxious to meet with my Michigan counterpart to build what I believe is a critical relationship from both a trade and transportation perspective.

[pause]

Keeping goods, services and people moving across our Ontario-Michigan border is so important to the McGuinty government that it was included in our election platform, along with other critical issues.

In my first weeks as Minister of Transportation, I've come to quickly appreciate the urgency and the complexities of the issues at our borders.

American and Canadian businesses need to be able to rely on safe, efficient borders to ensure they get their goods and services to market on time.

Local residents need to be assured that their concerns about environmental issues, traffic, and land use are being addressed.

And an innovative approach to find solutions to border issues needs to be developed with our private sector partners.

Last month, I attended the Trade Corridors Conference in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, where business and government leaders from both sides of the border met to find ways to enhance the Canadian-U.S. trading relationship.

The issues discussed – such as congestion at the Windsor-Detroit crossing – are very important to me and to my colleague, the Honourable Joe Cordiano, Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

For example, I understand there are 18 traffic signals between Ontario and Florida – and 17 of those are on Huron Church Road in Windsor between Highway 401 and the Ambassador Bridge.

The Ontario government understands that we can't have long line-ups of trucks stopping and starting at our borders – burning up fuel, time and patience.

That's why our government will invest in the necessary improvements to ensure safe, efficient access to our vital trade links.

But infrastructure improvements alone can't help the traffic flow if vehicles are held up at customs over security concerns.

In Canada, we took the words of U.S. Ambassador Paul Cellucci [*pronounced CELL-LOU-CHI*] very seriously when he said that trade is the priority for Canada, and security is the priority for the U.S.

“Security trumps trade,” he is quoted as saying.

I can tell you security is a priority for Canada.

Our government is committed to working with the Canadian and U.S. federal governments, and the Great Lakes States, to find real solutions to this complex issue.

Through collaborative efforts and innovative technology, we can create a safe, secure and efficient border.



In fact, there are a number of joint initiatives already underway to improve border security and expedite border crossings for low-risk individuals and businesses.

Ontario has also been working closely with Michigan on the Bi-National Planning Partnership to develop a long-term transportation plan for the Windsor-Detroit area.



In addition, our transportation ministries have been working together to manage our border crossings at Sarnia-Port Huron Sault Ste. Marie.

I want to explore how we can build on, and strengthen, these relationships beyond the planning stage – and create a broader, sustained partnership on infrastructure, border management and transportation management.

This means building new connections, not only with Michigan, but also with American and Canadian federal governments, and the agencies responsible for managing customs and immigration.

It's evident that there are many stakeholders who need to be heard, and there are many factors that need to be considered.

Minister Cordiano and I are committed to listening to stakeholders, and working together with the business community, the transportation industry, and all levels of government, to find solutions to the challenges we face at our borders.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, Ontario and Michigan share the same interests when it comes to our borders.

I hope I have demonstrated Ontario's willingness to work together with you to ensure our strong trading partnership continues to grow and prosper.

Thank you.